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Reaction to Chinese Nuclear Test

Governments worldwide have expressed regret over China's nuclear test on Tuesday, but most argue it should not be allowed to derail Comprehensive Test Ban talks, and no nuclear power has announced plans to resume testing.

British officials did not view the test as a setback for the test ban negotiations, US diplomats report. Russia was more pessimistic and said it could hamper the talks and efforts to extend the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty indefinitely. At the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, several states predicted the test would hurt chances to reach consensus on a test ban resolution at coming UN meetings but expressed hope that it would not affect CTB negotiations in January.

France announced that it would take all necessary steps to maintain a modern nuclear deterrent but did not say it would resume testing.

Either Russia or France could test next month if it made the decision now, but neither is likely to do so. French Prime Minister Balladur will be reluctant to test as long as Mitterrand remains opposed. Russia is unlikely to test unless the US or the UK does so first. Furthermore, it must provide a 200-day notification of any test.

Most states want the test ban negotiations to succeed and probably will moderate their criticism of China. Paris, London, and Moscow have said they will consult with Washington on future testing policy. They probably will monitor US reaction and probably will continue the moratorium unless the US appears willing to test.

Japanese officials asked the US and other nuclear powers not to resume testing in the wake of Beijing's action. Tokyo's response was particularly quick and resolute, probably an indication of how critical Tokyo believes progress on arms control and disarmament is to its national security in the post-Cold War era. South Korean Foreign Ministry officials are worried that the nuclear test may send the wrong message to North Korea, which has its own nuclear weapons program, but predicted no serious change in Chinese-South Korean cooperation on the North Korean nuclear matters, according to a press statement. Australia and New Zealand strongly condemned the test, which was conducted despite demarches made over the preceding two weeks. There is no indication that either is considering additional measures against Beijing.

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CHINA:

More Nuclear Tests Likely

Beijing probably will not become amenable to a comprehensive nuclear test ban until it completes its nuclear weapons modernization program later in this decade.

Comment: Beijing's decision to proceed with its testing program in the face of international pressure was driven by its need to modernize its nuclear force, built largely using 1960s and 1970s technology. Although China probably will be able to develop new warheads for its strategic and tactical missile systems by 1996, it probably will not be able to hold enough tests to incorporate new safety features, such as insensitive high explosives, into its warhead designs. If the Chinese do not complete all of the planned tests, some of their weapons programs may have to be curtailed.

Although Beijing has not rejected the possibility of a comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty that might take effect in the mid-to-late 1990s, it has raised obstacles to Chinese participation. At a minimum, Beijing will insist on its testing options and will continue to try to make a ban contingent on drastic future US-Russian nuclear arms reductions.

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